Factors Influencing the Development of Arabic Grammar (*Nahwu*)

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ABSTRACT

Nahwu (Arabic grammar) is a discipline aimed at understanding texts in the Arabic language. It was first codified by Imam Abu Aswad al-Du'aly under the instruction of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib during his tenure as caliph. The development of Nahwu was influenced by three main factors within the Arab-Islamic cultural context: religious, national, and political factors. The religious factor emphasizes the importance of Nahwu in reciting and comprehending the Qur'an. The national factor highlights the role of Arabic grammar in shaping Arab-Islamic national identity. The political factor illustrates how the social classification between Arabs and mawlas impacted the dissemination and development of Arabic grammar. Thus, Nahwu not only serves as a tool for understanding religious texts but also plays a significant role in shaping national identity and responding to socio-political dynamics in Arab-Islamic society.
Keyword: *Nahwu, Arabic Grammar, Factors.*

ABSTRAK

Ilmu Nahwu merupakan cabang ilmu yang bertujuan untuk memahami teks-teks dalam bahasa Arab. Ilmu ini pertama kali dikodifikasi oleh Imam Abu Aswad al-Du'aly atas instruksi Imam Ali bin Abi Thalib saat menjabat sebagai khalifah. Pengembangan ilmu Nahwu dipengaruhi oleh tiga faktor utama dalam konteks kebudayaan Arab-Islam, yaitu faktor keagamaan, kebangsaan, dan politik. Faktor keagamaan menekankan pentingnya Nahwu dalam membaca dan memahami Al-Qur'an. Faktor kebangsaan menunjukkan peran ilmu Nahwu dalam membangun identitas nasional Arab-Islam. Faktor politik menggambarkan bagaimana klasifikasi sosial antara Arab dan mawla mempengaruhi penyebaran dan perkembangan ilmu tata bahasa Arab. Dengan demikian, ilmu Nahwu tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai alat pemahaman teks keagamaan, tetapi juga memainkan peran penting dalam pembentukan identitas nasional dan dinamika sosial-politik masyarakat Arab-Islam.
Kata Kunci: *Nahwu, Ilmu Tata Bahasa Arab, Faktor-faktor.*

Introduction

Various instances of *lahn* (errors) and differences in *qira'at* (recitations) were the primary factors prompting the idea of standardizing the rules of Arabic grammar (*Nahwu*). The formulation of these rules by scholars since the first century of Hijra, passing through several phases, has essentially dealt with the substance of *Ushul an-Nahwi* in terms of quality and material essence.

Similar to *Ushul Fiqh* (Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence), *Ushul an-Nahwi* constitutes the principles underpinning the science of *Nahwu* in addressing various issues and applications. *Ushul an-Nahwi* not only highlights the sources, evidence, and principles of *Nahwu* as a discipline but also examines the differing opinions among grammarians in understanding Arabic linguistic phenomena from the pre-Islamic era (*jahiliyyah*) to the period of its standardization and codification. Just as *Ushul Fiqh* plays a critical role in the study of *Fiqh*, *Ushul an-Nahwi* holds significant importance in the field of *Nahwu*.

The development of this discipline has expanded beyond the Arab community to include the *Ajam* (non-Arabs), driven by several factors, including religious and socio-cultural aspects. In the contemporary context, social realities show that many students still struggle with mastering Nahwu; for example, analysis of Arabic essays by students of Arabic Education at UNJ revealed numerous syntactic and morphological errors (Marzuq, 2017). Other research shows that textbooks like *Kalamuna* still contain fundamental Nahwu errors, particularly in areas such as *maf'ūl bih*, *na'at-man'ūt*, *idhāfat*, *khabar kāna*, etc (Mamnunah et al., 2021). These findings indicate that, although there are efforts to simplify or reformulate Nahwu teaching (Muis et al., 2023), and developments of functional textbooks based on local wisdom (Azizah & Nashoih, 2023), there is still a research gap regarding how the principles of *Ushul an-Nahwi*, from an epistemological perspective, influence the understanding and application of Nahwu in the context of education in Indonesia.

Therefore, the present study aims to discuss the concept of *Ushul an-Nahwi* and the factors contributing to its development. This research is important not only for deepening the understanding of Arabic grammar as a discipline but also for providing a stronger foundation in Arabic language education, particularly to address the persistent grammatical challenges faced by contemporary learners, improve learning materials, and facilitate more effective teaching methods.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a focus on library research. Data were collected through an extensive literature review of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include classical Arabic grammar texts such as *Al-Kitab* of Sibawayh and other early works on Nahwu, while the secondary sources consist of scholarly studies, journal articles, and historical accounts that analyze the development of Nahwu within its socio-cultural context.

The selection of literature followed specific criteria: (1) relevance to the topic of Nahwu codification and its socio-religious context, (2) credibility of the publication (peer-reviewed journals, academic books, or classical works), and (3) representativenes across different time periods, from the early codification era to contemporary discussions.

The data analysis employed an interpretive method, which is commonly used in qualitative descriptive studies. The analysis involved three stages (Miles & Huberman, 1994):

1. Data reduction – organizing key information from texts and discarding irrelevant material.
2. Data display – mapping the relationship between religious, national, and political factors with the evolution of Nahwu.
3. Interpretation – providing contextual understanding of how Nahwu was shaped by Arab-Islamic civilization

By employing this approach, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of Nahwu not only as a linguistic discipline but also as a significant element in the broader framework of Arab-Islamic civilization.

Results and Discussion
1. Definition of *Nahwu*

Nahwu is a linguistic discipline aimed at understanding Arabic texts. This science was codified by Imam Abu Aswad al-Du'aly under the instruction of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib during his caliphate (Rini, 2019). The codification of *Nahwu* was driven by various factors, particularly religious and socio-cultural aspects (Zubaidillah, 2018). Religiously, *Nahwu* serves to preserve the correct recitation and interpretation of the Qur'an, preventing errors in understanding. Meanwhile, from a socio-cultural perspective, language is inseparable from human life and evolves in line with cultural development (Ni'mah, 2008).

Historically, Caliph Ali, along with Arabic linguists and Qur'anic scholars, contributed to the early formulation of *Nahwu* theories, laying the foundation for its emergence as a structured discipline. Over time, *Nahwu* evolved through systematic stages into a comprehensive field of study that examines Arabic grammar, benefiting both native and non-native Arabic learners.

In Arabic language learning, *Nahwu* plays a crucial role in achieving linguistic proficiency. Understanding its historical development provides learners with a deeper comprehension of its principles. As *Nahwu* is fundamentally a grammar-focused science, it is essential to study its foundations, including its primary sources.

The term *Uṣūl an-Nahw* refers to the foundational principles of Arabic grammar. It not only encompasses grammatical rules but also explores the process of their formation. *Uṣūl an-Nahw* serves as the theoretical framework for formulating syntactic principles, providing a comprehensive analysis of the evidence and methodologies used in Arabic syntax. Beyond identifying sources and principles, it also examines scholarly disagreements regarding Arabic linguistic phenomena. It functions as a legal framework guiding Arabic linguists in resolving syntactic disputes, making it a crucial reference in Arabic grammatical studies.

2. Factors Influencing the Development of *Nahwu*

The growth and evolution of Arabic grammar (*Nahwu*) have been a compelling subject of study among Arabic linguists from the past to the present. According to Arabic linguists, studying *Nahwu* from a historical perspective is essential, as it broadens learners' understanding of the dynamics of *Nahwu* and its development over time.

It is widely agreed among Arabic linguistic scholars that the initial concept, which later developed into the science of *Nahwu*, originated from Ali bin Abi Talib during his caliphate. This idea was driven by several key factors, including religious, national, and political considerations.

2.1 Religious Factors in the Development of *Nahwu*

The Quran is the greatest miracle of Islam, and Allah SWT has promised to preserve it. It serves as the constitution of Islam, containing guidelines for worship, behavior, etiquette, and social relations for Muslims of the past, present, and future. The Quran has always been and will continue to be revered by Muslims, who are committed to preserving its purity without unnecessary alterations. However, concerns over potential misinterpretations or distortions have arisen, prompting early Muslim scholars to take significant steps in safeguarding the Quranic text from errors in recitation.

One of the earliest concerns about misreading the Quran became evident during the caliphate of Uthman bin Affan. He noticed that different communities were disputing over Quranic recitations, each claiming superiority over the others. To prevent confusion, Uthman ordered a standardized compilation of the Quran, relying on manuscripts kept by Hafsah bint Umar. This compilation, known as the Uthmani Mushaf, was distributed to various regions, while other existing copies were withdrawn to establish a unified standard.

However, the Arabic script used in the Uthmani Mushaf lacked diacritical marks and vowel signs, making it vulnerable to misreading. This led to the emergence of *lahn* (errors in pronunciation and recitation). While *lahn* had existed since the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), it was rare because the Quran was primarily recited by native Arabic speakers. However, as Islam spread beyond the Arabian Peninsula, non-Arab Muslims increasingly encountered difficulties in accurate Quranic recitation, raising concerns about the potential impact on Islamic teachings (Dhaif, 1968).

Recognizing this issue, Caliph Ali bin Abi Talib, known for his eloquence and linguistic expertise, sought a solution. However, due to his involvement in internal conflicts, he delegated the task to his student, Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali. As a brilliant scholar from Basra, Abu al-Aswad was entrusted with addressing the rising problem of *lahn* among Muslim communities.

Historical accounts widely acknowledge Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali as the pioneer of Arabic grammar (*Nahwu*). His most significant contribution was the introduction of diacritical marks to the Quran. Since the original Quranic script lacked dots and vowel markers, distinguishing similar-looking letters was difficult (e.g., *dal* and *dhal*, *sin* and *shin*). Moreover, the absence of vowel markers (e.g., *fathah*, *kasrah*, and *dhammah*) led to pronunciation errors, especially among non-Arab Muslims (Al-Fadlali, 1986).

To address this issue, Abu al-Aswad devised a system of diacritical marks using different-colored ink: a dot above the letter for *fathah*, a dot below for *kasrah*, and a dot on the upper left side for *dhammah*. His innovation played a crucial role in unifying Muslims under a standardized Quranic recitation. Without such a system, various interpretations and inconsistent recitations could have led to

sectarian divisions within the Muslim community. Even with uniform recitation, differences in Quranic interpretation still persist.

Thus, Abu al-Aswad's efforts to introduce diacritical marks into the Quran were instrumental in preserving the linguistic integrity of the sacred text. His work marked a pivotal moment in the history of *Nahwu*, demonstrating how religious concerns played a fundamental role in the development of Arabic grammar (Sirajuddin, 1992).

2.2 Nationalistic Factors

Shortly after the passing of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, the Arab nation realized that they were encountering civilizations with rich and diverse cultural heritages. Meanwhile, the Arabs themselves lacked a civilization or culture of comparable magnitude. They found themselves in direct contact with the Sassanian culture in Iraq and Persia, as well as the Greco-Roman culture in Syria and Egypt. Additionally, they were influenced by Indian culture through Persian intermediaries, Egyptian and Coptic culture in Egypt, Syriac culture in Iraq and Syria, Nabatean culture in the black region of Iraq, and Jewish culture in southern Iraq and wherever Jewish communities preserved their Hebrew traditions.

The Arabs had to make considerable efforts to establish a national culture that upheld and disseminated the divine message they had received—the Qur'an. However, the issue at hand was not merely the preservation of the Qur'anic text, as in the case of religious factors, but rather ensuring that the Qur'an became the focal point of Arab cultural endeavors from beginning to end. Thus, the challenge was not confined to grammatical concerns but extended to what can be broadly termed as Islamic culture as a whole. The Qur'an possesses multiple dimensions, comprehensible only to Allah and those deeply versed in knowledge. This necessitated the development of Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir). If the Qur'an serves as the constitution of the Muslim community, then the hadiths provide its legal elaboration. Consequently, the science of hadith emerged, encompassing the study of transmission chains (isnad), narrators, collection methods, and interpretative approaches. The Qur'an was revealed in "clear Arabic speech," and every part of it remains inherently linked to Arab culture.

As a miraculous literary text composed of both factual statements and metaphors, the Qur'an necessitated the formal study of its figurative language, which eventually evolved into the discipline of rhetoric (balaghah). While religious factors motivated the Arabs to memorize the Qur'anic text, nationalistic factors compelled them to extract wisdom from it. The Arabs established their authentic cultural foundations upon the Qur'an.

The Arab nation was known for its deep sense of pride and linguistic zeal, which drove them to safeguard and purify the Arabic language from foreign influences. In alignment with this cultural aspiration, Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib initiated the formalization of Arabic grammatical rules. His efforts were later supported by scholars who were deeply committed to both the Qur'an and the development of the Arabic language. Through a gradual and continuous process, they formulated theoretical frameworks that laid the groundwork for the discipline of Arabic grammar (nahw). Like other fields of knowledge, Arabic grammar did not

emerge in a complete and perfected form instantaneously but rather evolved progressively over an extended period.

2.3 Political Factors

During the Umayyad era, which established a monarchical system of governance, the Muslim community became divided into Arabs and mawālī (non-Arabs). The Arabs, who spoke their own language, naturally used both the Qur'anic and national language, which positioned them as the dominant group. As a result, during the Umayyad period, few mawālī attained high-ranking positions within the state.

Language was likely the primary barrier preventing most mawālī from reaching these positions. Apart from a few mawālī who were raised among Arabs—such as Ibn Abi Ishaq, Bashar, and Al-Hasan Al-Basri—who acquired eloquence and fluency in Arabic, the majority of mawālī did not experience social equality with Arabs.

To address this, Abu Al-Aswad and his contemporaries formulated early grammatical classifications, such as categorizing words and establishing punctuation markers within sentences. This provided the mawālī with a means to learn the language of religion, governance, and society. Consequently, the study of Arabic grammar was eventually led by the mawālī, giving rise to renowned grammarians among them, such as Abu Amr ibn Al-Ala, Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad, and Abu Uthman Al-Mazini. Their contributions swiftly steered Arabic linguistics toward a more scientific approach.

Due to these political circumstances, Arabic grammar evolved beyond being a tool for educating the caliphs' children and the aristocracy. It became an accessible discipline for all, including both free individuals and mawālī. As a result, the mawālī gradually integrated into society as full citizens, whereas they were previously regarded as outsiders.

How did the study of grammar contribute to this transformation? Over time, it became an educational instrument that facilitated linguistic mastery, thus empowering the mawālī both socially and politically. The political conditions of the time encouraged the mawālī to advance in their study of grammar, driven by their devotion to the Qur'anic language as well as their pursuit of societal recognition. By the end of the Umayyad period, mawālī had successfully engaged in public life, and with the establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate, they secured prominent positions within the state. The language of religion and governance had become their own, eliminating ignorance as a barrier to power and authority.

3. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that the development of Arabic grammar (Nahwu) cannot be separated from its socio-cultural context, particularly religious, national, and political factors. These results are in line with Rahman (2010), who emphasized that the earliest codification of Nahwu was primarily driven by the urgency to safeguard the Qur'an from errors in recitation (*lahn*). The religious motivation in preserving the Qur'an served as the most fundamental catalyst,

consistent with the view of Asy'ari, Idhan, and Punawan (2020), who argued that Nahwu emerged as an indispensable tool for understanding Islamic teachings.

From a national perspective, this study highlights how the Qur'an functioned not only as a sacred text but also as a foundation for Arab-Islamic identity. This finding strengthens the argument of Daulay (2019) that Islamic education and linguistic development were integral to the construction of Arab culture in the early centuries of Islam. In this regard, the establishment of Arabic grammar played a dual role: preserving linguistic purity and fostering national pride.

The political dimension also proves to be a decisive factor in the evolution of Nahwu. The distinction between Arabs and *mawālī* created an environment in which mastery of Arabic grammar became essential for social mobility. This corresponds with the findings of Massofia et al. (2024), who noted that language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as an instrument of power and legitimacy in society. The active participation of non-Arab grammarians, such as Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad, further indicates how political realities opened new spaces for linguistic innovation and scholarship.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the development of Nahwu is a dynamic process influenced by the interplay of religion, nationhood, and politics. This multidimensional perspective enriches previous research (Fuadah, 2022; Rizka Widayanti et al., 2023) by showing that Nahwu is not merely a linguistic discipline but also a civilizational project that shaped Arab-Islamic identity. Moreover, the analysis of *Uṣūl an-Nahw* provides a more profound epistemological understanding of how grammatical rules were codified and transmitted across generations.

Conclusion

Nahwu (Arabic grammar) is a discipline aimed at understanding Arabic texts. It was codified by Imam Abu Aswad al-Du'aly under the instruction of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib during his tenure as caliph. This idea was driven by several factors, including religious and socio-cultural motivations. Three primary factors influenced the development of Arabic grammar (*Nahwu*) within the Arab-Islamic cultural context:

1. **Religious Factor:** This pertains to the use of *Nahwu* in reciting the Qur'an. It underscores the importance of understanding grammar to comprehend sacred texts and religious practices.
2. **National Factor:** This discussion highlights the role of the Qur'an in shaping Arab-Islamic identity and national pride. Grammar was not merely a tool for understanding texts but also for building Arab-Islamic national identity.
3. **Political Factor:** This refers to how political aspects, such as the social classification between Arabs and mawlas (non-Arab converts), influenced the development of Arabic grammar. Mawlas played a crucial role in disseminating Arabic grammar due to their need for Arabic language education to integrate into society.

Nahwu not only serves as a tool for understanding religious texts but also plays a significant role in shaping national identity and addressing socio-political changes.

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